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ABSTRACT

This paper examines multicultural education--its history, goals, for whom it is designed, and who is responsible for initiating programs. The literature is in general accord with the view that the educational system should be responsive to the fact that the United States is culturally diverse. This fact is taken as the ground for asserting that diversity should be both reflected in school curricula and valued by those who work in education, especially teachers and administrators. In most of the literature, multicultural education is presented as a humanistic as well as a relativistic concept. It is a means of celebrating diversity, striving for human rights and social justice, and legitimizing the alternative life choices and various styles of all people. In 1972 the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act was passed by Congress, emphasizing the heterogeneity of America's population. In the same year the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education adopted a statement on multicultural education which upheld the value of cultural pluralism as the ultimate goal of multicultural education. Multicultural education rests on the fact of cultural diversity and the ideology of cultural pluralism. It is necessary to have a policy of multicultural education. Programs must be designed for all members of society. Placing the burden for implementing multicultural education programs on institutions of higher learning will not achieve more than moderate success without broad-based civic and societal support. (RM)

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: A NEED FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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FOREWORD

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MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: A NEED FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

Richard N. Pratte

Introduction

The phrase "multicultural education" is a trendy one today. Although the literature of this phenomenon is quite extensive, most of it is not overly impressive in quality. Moreover, the progress made in implementing multicultural education seems tentative at best and misguided at worst. Present continuities with some past attempts are clear. But some new faces and discontinuities are similarly apparent - along with some complexities and complications which make today's multicultural education scene one that might receive mixed reviews or notices.

In the pages to follow, I shall examine the state of multicultural education and ask you to reflect upon your own thinking and experience regarding it. But first, I take it as axiomatic that no discussion of multiculturalism and multicultural education is possible, at least on a philosophical level, unless one seeks to unmask the wretched experience, for many of our past generations and our newer arrivals, of social and economic inequality rendered more damaging by racial prejudice and discrimination. But this view of philosophy is tempered by Karl Marx's observation that philosophy can never change the world. In short, a philosopher is confronted with a dilemma: on the one hand, s/he should expose unjust social practices; on the other hand, s/he knows that such an unmasking, even if well done and true, will probably not make a difference in society in the short and long run.

Hence, I hope that what I have to say on the topic of multicultural education will to some small extent speak to those urgent and difficult quest-

ions about the educational needs of minority groups and about discrimination and prejudice in society at large, but without the assumption that I will offer solutions that will guide the policies of social institutions. My purpose is not to offer solutions, but rather to yield a general framework and in fact provide logical support for the sort of policies and practices with what many concerned with and for multicultural education would want.

Setting the Stage

In a most general sense, I will deal with the basis conceptual issues surrounding multicultural education. My findings will be based on an examination of a rather prescriptive body of literature from the decade of the 1970's, primarily designed to offer a normative relationship between cultural diversity (sometimes mistakenly called "cultural pluralism") and multicultural education.[1] There is, undoubtedly, a large omission of materials that could be reviewed for this subject. Hence, to try to rectify the situation, four basic questions will be raised and dealt with. The questions are: (1) What is the background of multicultural education? (2) Why have a policy of multicultural education? (3) For whom is multicultural education designed? and (4) Who is responsible for initiating multicultural education programs?

Background

The evidence provided by the prescriptive literature suggests that a favorable attitude towards multicultural education usually entails a rejection of cultural elitism and an explicit or implicit acceptance of some notion of relativism. Regarding the former point, it may be time to pity America's white Protestant majority, although they still hold the high ground in America. Until recently the impending eclipse of the white Protestant leadership simply meant

That a somewhat more heterogeneous group of leaders would pursue the same ends with much the same faith in Anglo-American rationality, diplomacy and parliamentary style.

But all this has changed. We no longer talk about, agree upon, or pursue consensual goals. Rather, we show an increased reliance on diverse forms and values. Not only have many interest groups become involved in the political control of mainstream education, more importantly, numerous potentially significant alternatives to the mainstream systems of public school have arisen. Among them are alternative schools within public schools, the private community and free school movements, proposals for vouchers, ethnic studies programs, multicultural programs, and bilingual programs.

While it is common to attribute the rise of these phenomena to efforts to solve various problems in the larger society - delinquency, illiteracy, teen-aged pregnancies, truancy and urban crime - and in the more specific school setting - undertrained, incompetent, or apathetic teachers, bureaucratic over-size, inadequate financing, poor communications, irrelevant curricula, and too many or too few children - there is a larger issue, and it is often overlooked.

First of all, the primary function of schooling is socialization, whether the school is viewed from the perspective of the society, the community, the parents, or the child. The primary question underlying the present malaise in education is <u>socialization toward what</u>? The history of assimilation or Americanization in the United States suggests two overarching reasons why so many immigrants learned so fast, asked so few questions, and saw their children rise so rapidly in the social orderduring the first decades of this century. We have

all heard of America's melting pot: the Great Crucible. What we know now is that the main fire the fueled the melting pot was shame. The immigrants were instructed, implicitly and explicitly, in how to reject their pasts, their traditions, their family names, their class patterns, histories and values; and even their own faces. This shame had incredible power to make people learn, especially when it was coupled with hope - the American Dream - hope about becoming accepted, established, modern, respected and secure.

But both shame and hope are no longer viable forces in shaping today's schooling purposes. The terrible price of becoming socialized by these means is now known. Increasingly there are fewer reasons for poor, white working class, racial minorities, and recent Asian-Pacific or Hispanic immigrants looking to elite values and feeling either shameful about their own histories and traditions, or hopeful about the prospects of assimilating into the American mainstream. Today they seek new directions, and are no longer willing to sacrifice their own aspirations, histories, ideas, memories, sentiments and socio-cultural styles for the sake of a socialization pointed toward the Anglo-American tradition as it is exemplified by the dominant white Protestant element. Ethnic self-respect and dignity have become new forces, and they are embodied in the demand that socialization in the public schools of the United States must take a different and more pluralistic form.

Consider these brief extracts: " . . . positive attempts should be made to build upon the considerable strengths and riches that children of diverse cultures bring to the schools environment."[2] "A system of public education sympathetic to a legitimate cultural diversity demands standards drawn from more than one culture . . . the curriculum requires that due recognition be given to all who contributed to our national heritage."[3] Or, "There is a need for the inclusion of themes and topics which relate to multicultural Britain

. . . students should be brought to value cultural differences and to accept the others' right to be different and British at the same time."[4] The spirit, at any rate, of all these extracts is clear enough. It amounts to the view that, in some sense, differences among cultures are to be celebrated rather than denied, distorted or used as a justification for invidious cultural comparisons.

Now while there are many issues to be raised, the immediate task is to see that even a cursory reading of the prescriptive literature on multicultural education shows a strong attachment to a generally relativistic attitude. Although the literature is pretty much at the "show and tell" stage - most of the readings attempt to explain multicultural education and then offer examples of programs of implementation or development. Although the various authors apparently have not read one another's works or have little contact with one another, there is agreement that better intercultural understanding is a highly valued commodity.

For example, it is commonly agreed that since aesthetic, moral and religious beliefs are relative to cultures, and not understandable except in terms of the concepts employed within particular cultures, one should, in a multicultural curriculum, exercise sensitivity when teaching about them. Either teachers should refrain from transmitting them in a positive way or, perhaps, leave them to be dealt with in supplementary fashion. They might, for example, be taught in separate, elective schooling manned by teachers who are themselves rooted in the particular cultures.

So, to summarize thus far. The prescriptive literature is in general accord with the view that the educational system should be responsive to the fact that the United States is culturally diverse. This fact is taken as the

ground or warrant for asserting that diversity should both (1) be reflected in school curricula, and (2) be valued by those who work in education - especially teachers and administrators. This general position is useful to some degree, but it fails to address the major basic issues of, say, the dependence of multicultural education on the premise of cultural relativism. This is a deplorable confusion that mistakes cultural relativism for ethical relativism - treating a description as if it were an evaluation. It is a language usage that confuses cultural diversity (which we have) with cultural pluralism (which has not been achieved). It thus leaves as many new questions to be answered as were raised initially.

It is true that historical perspective indicates that there has been and probably always will be a multiplicity of American cultures. The core of the concept of multicultural education embraces the ideas of recognizing and prizing diversity, developing greater understanding regarding other cultural patterns, respecting individuals of all cultures, and developing positive and productive interaction among peoples and among the experiences of diverse cultural groups. Thus, in most of the literature, multicultural education is presented as a humanistic as well as a relativistic concept. It is a means of celebrating diversity, striving for human rights and social justice, and legitimizing the alternative life choices and various styles of all people.

Moreover, in 1972 the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act was passed by Congress emphasizing the heterogeneity of America's population. It stressed that cultures can be different from one another, without being regarded as superior or inferior. In the same year the Board of Directors of the American Association

of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) adopted a statement on multicultural education entitled "No One Model American." The statement rejected assimilation and separatism as ultimate goals of multicultural education and upheld the value of cultural pluralism. It read, in part, as follows:

> Multicultural education affirms that schools should be oriented toward the cultural enrichment of all children and youth through programs rooted in the preservation and extention of cultural alternatives. Multicultural education recognizes cultural diversity as a fact of life in American society, and it affirms that this cultural diversity is a valuable resource that should be preserved and extended. It affirms that major educational institutions should strive to preserve and enhance cultural pluralism.[5]

It is clear, then, that multicultural education rests on the fact of cultural diversity and the ideology of cultural pluralism. It is focused on the objectives or goals of cross-cultural acceptance and understanding. That is to say, it is misleading in the extreme, in my judgment, to refer to cultural diversity as ideology; this simply is not the case. Moreover, it is equally misleading to believe that we have always aspired to the ideology of cultural pluralism. We have not marched steadily toward it; we merely stumbled into it. We got cultural diversity - ethnic, racial and religious groupsing - due to historical factors: immigration and multiplication. The building of a new nation in the New World is an old story now. It began with an extra-ordinarily heterogeneous population and this phenomenon never has been arrested, despite changes in immigration laws. The fact is that old groupings remain viable and new ones continue to form in America. Hence, the old groups multiplied and were added to by new arrivals until there was nothing anyone could do to absorb them.

Thus, through no great design or plan, we settled on giving the diverse cultural groups permission to exist. We now call the ideal state of culturally

diverse groups living together in the same society "cultural pluralism." To a considerable degree, then, we found, to our vast delight, that by default in some instances, and by positively proclaiming the virtue of cultural diversity in others, we could congratulate ourselves on having achieved a democratic public ideology of cultural diversity: cultural pluralism.

Why have a Policy of Multicultural Education?

Stated most generally, the chief problem is: Should the curriculum of the schools be changed to reflect the diverse nature of society? In answer we might say that several positions have been given as basic, such as (1) ethnic fallacies and stereotypes should be corrected, (2) prejudice and unfair discrimination are best dealt with in a school whose curriculum is multicultural; and (3) students who live in a diverse society must learn the attitudes, knowledges, skills and values of other cultures. This learning will give our youth the possibility of introspection and self-awareness so necessary for successful intercultural and global living in our interdependent world.

From the facts that we live in a culturally diverse society and that our pupils represent a diversity of cultures, must we go beyond this to the view that the school should seek to promote cultural diversity as a goal? What I am talking about here goes far beyond the crudely relativistic concentration in the schools on, say, different cultural diets for different cultural groups or varied curricula for people of different cultural backgrounds. In short, if this question is raised, then it becomes apparent that almost everything remains to be done in the task of building a full rationale for the acceptance of multicultiral education, and of translating that rationale into direct policies and curricular components.

For example, how far might school curricula go toward promoting cultural diversity without creating cultural divisions? No less important than this

issue of potential divisiveness is the question of what sort of society it is that an acceptable program of multicultural education might be aiming to produce. These issue, I take it, have philosophical dimensions, and thus it is perhaps true that philosophy can help in some small way.

In the literature it is generally taken for granted that (1) the United States is a culturally diverse society, and (2) education, especially public schooling, ought to reflect that fact. Rarely is the first assumption defended, and this point is never at issue, but the second is staunchly upheld. Moreover, the reform of the curriculum is required by the second assumption. In practice, most of the proposals for reform along the lines of multicultural education often concentrate upon the inclusion in the curriculum of selected content that is derived from the cultural histories or traditions of ethnic groups, now become vocal minorities, who presently form an important and bigger part of the schools' clientele.

Stated most generally, the chief practical problem is: How should the curricula of schools be changed to reflect the diverse nature of society? To take up the qyestion of substantive content first, one vital question is: Which of any group's beliefs, practices and/or values ought to be included? To answer this question we have to consider whether we should be completely tolerant or relativistic. Or, if not, what ought our principles of selection be, and why?

But there is also another level to consider: What purpose is the curriculum to fulfill? For example, do we want their schooling to confirm children in particular ways of life or to be complete outsiders to all groups? Is it some happy combination of the two for which we aim, if this is at all possible?

You will note that much of how we answer the foregoing questions is moral, and a good deal of the literature dealing with multicultural education is prescriptively moral. Some of the moralizing springs from a genuinely compassionate and essentially moral source, for it involves the recognition by school persons of good will of the great extent to which children's recognition of themselves as persons of worth is rooted in cultural definitions of personal and group worth. Also, to deny to parents the right to pass on the beliefs and values that they hold most dear to their children through the medium of formal education, with the authority of the wider society behind it, is either to alienate the children from their homes and families or alienate them from whatever benefits that schooling has to offer.

It is perhaps a simplification to put the foregoing problem in terms of either/or, but it is not an overstatement, no less a crudity, to assert the probable rejection of schooling by a child if the schooling denegates one's own group's traditions and beliefs. We are all familiar these days with the moral view that it is the right of the student to have security from the wanton destruction of cherished group beliefs and values. What we must avoid, however, is "cultural protectionism" by confusing an understanding of how a belief arose or happened to pervade a culture with an assessment of the <u>value</u> of its content, a judgment of its correctness. It is easy to allow this confusion about another's beliefs to deny anybody the making of judgments. In short, beliefs must be treated as beliefs, not like quaint ethnic gems - the sacred relics of previous generations. We must explore them from the perspective of engagement in education. They should not only be described but also interpreted critically in the pursuit of responsibility and truth.

In effect, whatever the stated reasons for having a policy of multicultural education, the grim social realities of today stack the cards heavily against not having such programs. I really do not see any alternative to a policy of multicultural education, nor do I wish to suggest one.

For Whom Is Multicultural Education Designed?

There seem to be two answers to the question of who are the intended constituency of multicultural education programs. The first, perhaps ideal, is that multicultural education is for everybody. It is claimed that the perpetuation of a culturally diverse society is a desired goal, while at the same time the contributions of people from ethnic groups, classes and cultures which are often different and at odds with the majority are valued. Many contextual factors in society can impede the attainment of this long term goal, but multicultural education is certainly one effective and moral instrument for approaching it. Research is cited which suggests that students coming out of multicultural education programs are less likely to denigate others' values and positions. Hence, a broad acceptance and implementation of multicultural education for all would go a long way toward helping our society attain its ultimate goal of being truly multicultural.

The second answer, however, issues from those who view multicultural education as an inferior or second class education. Such an extreme characterization is perhaps not the dominant view. It reflects the assumption that the host or dominant group "grudgingly" recognizes its cultural minorities and agrees that their beliefs and valued traditions should form some part of the content of education under duress. This recognition is tempered by the insistence that although subject matter will be taught in a modified way to include traditions

from various cultural groups, school subjects will still be taught as distinct disciplines. Hence, the tolerance element implicit in multicultural education is, where this approach is used, coupled with selectivity regarding what items from minority cultures will be inserted into the conventional framework. Hence, although the very fact that the curriculum has been modified seems to implement broadening the tolerance of divergent views and fostering intercultural values, these programs rarely go so far as to explicitly support, or actually extol, the desirability of a multicultural society. (As a real example of this we may think of a minority fiercely protecting its identity against a wider society which is perceives as degenerate and immoral, and of a tolerant majority permitting the minority to provide a special and intellectually limiting education designed to arm its children against seduction from its traditional ways and beliefs.)

The models of favored multicultural education programs seem to be aimed at any population willing to accept the view that it has no critical autonomy or way of life assumed to be the pinnacle of civilization. Hence, cross-cultural sympathy and tolerance may be fostered, but at least some principles of thought and a few basic values are held to be better. In practical terms, this means that we have not yet embraced a dynamic context for multicultural education wherein students' beliefs (as representing, say, ethnic groups) are exchanged, argued about, defended, assessed, converted, retained, ignored, and so on. There is, too obviously, a sort of "cultural protectionism," meaning that too often group beliefs are treated with a patronizing acceptance or a refusal to take the belief seriously. This failure to encourage vigorous "engagement" is the greatest threat to multicultural education programs. It issues from a staunch unwillingness on the part of many Americans to go down the road to a commitment

to a truly multicultural society. In short, no amount of "band aid" multicultural information stuck onto the conventional disciplines and subject areas will be a "cure" for the symptoms of a society that refuses to take seriously its cultural diversity.

Who Is Responsible for Initiating Multicultural Education Programs?

We may ask who is responsible for multicultural education programs during the initial stages of development? In general, the majority of authors concur that it is the responsibility of classroom teachers to initiate and develop such programs regardless of problems created in the environment where they teach. This, to me, seems highly improbable and lacks the direction and support of organizational structures needed for success. But Carl Grant in his work, Multicultural Education, suggests that the dominant attitude of most American teachers is their willingness to initiate multicultural education programs. He asserts that most teachers will find little difficulty understanding cultural diversity and should be able to implement various multicultural programs with little or no resistance from the administration or fellow staff members. (I found this to be an extremely optimistic view, and I believe that I would take exception to the premise that school administrators would not interfere in general curricular changes offered by the faculty, unless the initiation of these programs had been either generated or approved by district superintendents and local school boards.)

A quite different approach, and an exception to the view of the teacher as the primary change agent, is found in the Canadian literature regarding their approach to implementing multicultural education programs. The recommendations made by the Ministry of Education at the twenty-fourth annual conference of

Ontario's Association for Curriculum Development in 1975 had two emphases. First, they stressed that all children should be given an opportunity to develop and retain a personal identity by becoming acquainted with the historical roots of the community and culture of their origin, and thereby developing a sense of continuity with the past. Second, all children should also begin to appreciate and understand the points of view of ethnic and cultural groups other than their own.[6]

Canada has taken the position that it is the responsibility of the Government, especially the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Recreation, to initiate a series of programs and activities to increase multicultural understanding. Therefore, the Canadian government makes grants to develop learning materials, fund staff meetings, and provide activity days, conferences and workshops on multicultural education. The Canadian policy stresses the importance of disseminating programs that deal with issues that are often referred to as assimilation, integration, marginality and separation. It does not, however, address a number of subtle issues, such as the economic, political and social factors prohibiting, or at least impeding change, in Canadian society.

The message is clear and it is of major import when aligned next to the NCATE Standards. Of the six categories in the NCATE Standards, the one concerning curriculum most directly addresses the issue of multicultural teacher education. The Standard specifically addressing multicultural education (in this case in undergraduate education) and its accompanying preamble provide a definition of and state the purposes for multicultural education in teacher education programs.

> Multicultural education is preparation for the social, political, and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters. These realities have both national and international dimensions. This preparation provides a process by which an individual developes

> competencies for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and behaving in different cultural settings. Thus, multicultural education is viewed as an intervention and an on-going assessment process to help institutions and individuals become more responsive to the human condition, individual cultural integrity, and cultural pluralism in society.[7]

This Standard and its accompanying preamble clearly dictate that multicultural education must be emphasized in both teacher education programs and also in the general education components. It must involve a variety of affective and cognitive learning experiences. It must also receive major attention in all elements of the total program, from the conventional classroom courses to the clinical and student teaching experiences. Moreover, in the component of the Standards relating to faculty, NCATE makes continuing reference to the importance of promoting multicultural teacher education. Teachers, the NCATE writers emphasize, must be prepared to work in a multicultural society, and the preparation, expertise and experiences of the faculty ought to reflect relevance to multicultural factors. In this context, the NCATE writers point out, " The institution's commitment to multicultural education is reflected in its policies for recruiting teacher education faculty." (This criterion, by the way, is to be applied to both full-time and part-time faculty.) Additionally, the institution should have a plan for faculty in-service development that, "includes appropriate opportunities for developing and implementing innovations in multicultural education . . . "

This list could be extended, but what is important is that the message is clear: we in teacher education have been assigned a responsibility. What this portends, however, is not at all clear. I offer, for example, one approach being taken at Ohio University (Athens, Ohio) in response to a forthcoming NCATE accreditation visit. Recently, a document was given to the faculty concerning needed information about the variety and scope of programs in the College of

Education. Under the category "Multicultural Education," the following statement appeared:

> Standard - The institution gives evidence of planning to provide for multicultural education in its advanced curricula - in the content for the specialty, the humanistic and behavioral studies, the theory relevant to the specialty, with direct and simulating experiences in professional practice, as defined in Standard G-2.2.[8]

Instructions were given to the faculty asking for information concerning courses presently taught that dealt with various multicultural topics. Courses, it was said, need not be titled in a multicultural sense, but should deal in a "significant manner" with multicultural aspects of the American society and/or other cultures. What was lacking, however, in any of the requests for information sent out by the College authorities, was a working definition of multicultural education programs. They provided no exposition of their goals and processes, as well as their content. It would be my best professional guess that Ohio University would not differ greatly from other public institutions throughout the country in their lack of articulating conceptual grounds and empirical parameters concerning multicultural education programs. Moreover, the Ohio University experience is probably similar to that of people in many other institutions who are preparing for NCATE accreditation visits and witnessing efforts to introduce curricular changes in the multicultural education area.

Conclusion

Although many questions are certainly left unanswered in a paper of this length, a number of concepts and issues were approached on the basis of identifying the principal objectives of multicultural education programs. What has been initiated was also viewed with a pragmatic eye toward the implementation of programs for all members of society. Multicultural education programs designed only for limited audiences are doomed to failure. Placing the burden for

implementing multicultural education programs on institutions of higher learning will not achieve more than moderate success without broad-based civic and societal support. I conclude this examination of taking cultural diversity into account in schooling, by indicating that any new curriculum presupposes a public interest. General support for multicultural education is likely to be forthcoming when "insofar as public interest policy (it) will benefit a parent not as a parent but as a member of the public, along with everyone else, and all citizens benefit under the same description."[9]

Finally, and you may regard this as either an interesting challenge or a "copout", there are certainly economic, legal and political reasons for having multicultural education. But if you will carefully look behind each of these pragmatic grounds, I think that you can also recognize good, solid moral and professional grounds for supporting multicultural education.

NOTES

1. Literally "cultural diversity" is used in a purely descriptive way to characterize the coexistence of age, ethnic, political, racial, religious and social groups living together in a way that allows the society to function and maintain itself. In short, the term is descriptive of a situation in which any number of subgroups in the total society retain their identity while functioning with each other. It is clear that a society may be culturally diverse without being culturally pluralistic. Consider, for example, the case of state Y wherein although there coexist, say, racial groups, only members of the dominant minority enjoy equal legal and political privileges. The other group, the majority, is disenfranchised and does not enjoy even the minimum quality of education, housing, and economic opportunity. Hence, even though there is cultural diversity, we have here a caste society instead of one that is culturally pluralistic.

2. J. White and D. Houlton, "Biculturalism in the Primary School," Forum, 20, Autumn, 1977.

3. Richard N. Pratte, "Cultural Diversity and Education," in K. Strike and K. Egan, (eds.) Ethics and Educational Policy. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 162.

4. R. Giles, Ethics and Educational Policy, pp. 163-4.

5. As found in William A. Hunter, Multicultural Education through Competency-Based Teacher Education. Washington, D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1974, pp. 21-3.

6. Sheilah V.C. Dubois, (ed.) Conference on Multiculturalism in Education. Ottawa, Canada: Mutual Press, 1977, p. 5.

7. National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education. Washington, D.C.: NCATE, 1977, p. 4.

8. Ibid.

9. Richard N. Pratte, Pluralism in Education: Conflict, Clarity, and Commitment. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1979, p. 81.

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